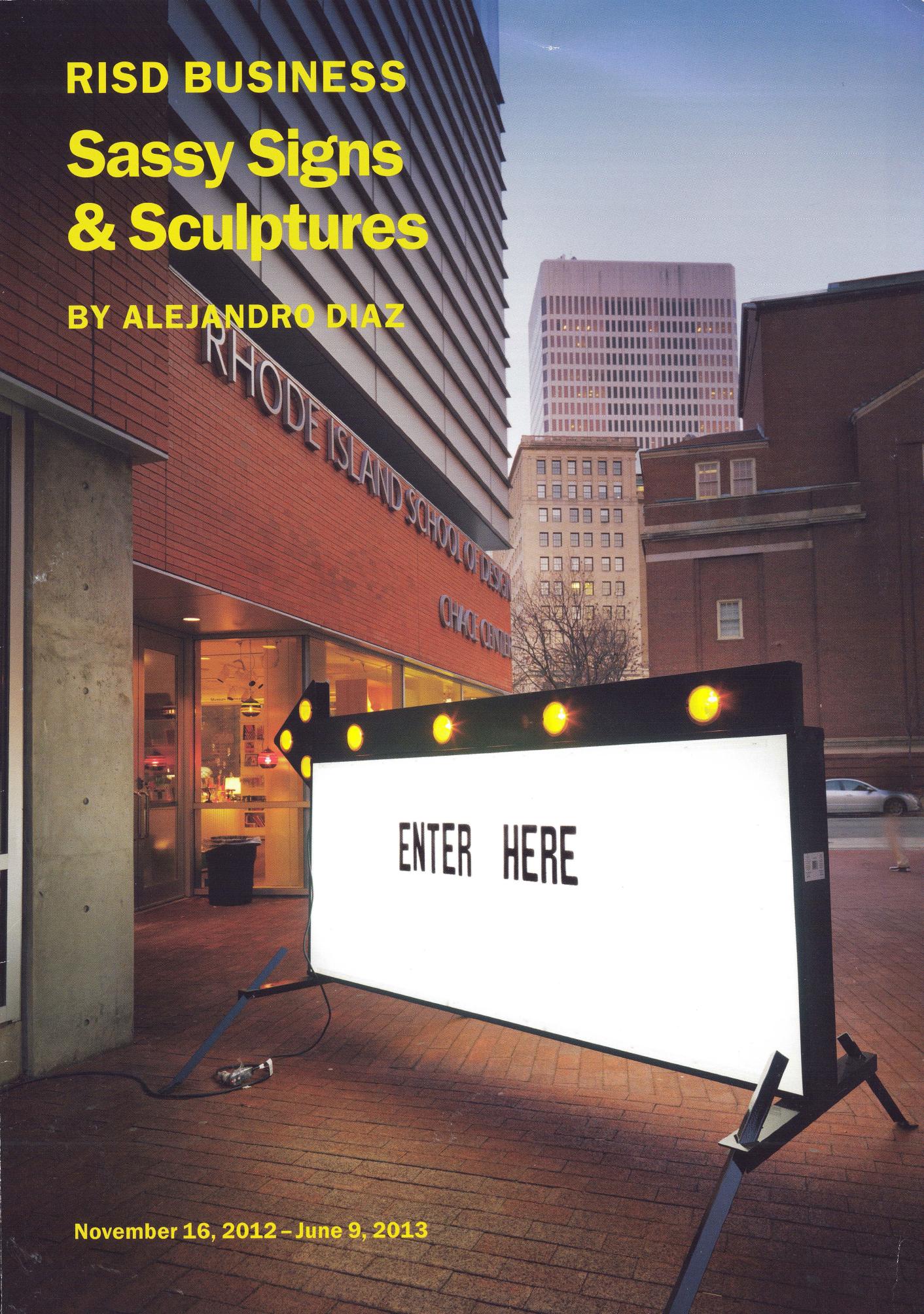


RISD BUSINESS Sassy Signs & Sculptures

BY ALEJANDRO DIAZ



November 16, 2012 – June 9, 2013

From the Curator



Ranging from quaint stereotypes of Mexican identity to current socio-economic and art-world commentary, Alejandro Diaz's text-based works and installations use language as a form of cultural critique and resistance. Conceptual and campy, his humor-infused politics and choice of everyday materials are emblematic of his ongoing involvement with art as a form of entertainment, activism, public intervention, and free enterprise. His projects take place outdoors on city streets as well as inside galleries and museums.

In addition to the iconic cardboard signs for which Diaz is best known, the exhibition features a number of new works. They range from individual sculptures made with found or off-the-shelf materials to an architectural installation, the *Diaz Art Foundation*—a museum-within-a-museum displaying numerous objects from the artist's own collection. Diaz's wit and irreverence draw us into his work, but below the surface are layered references to the history of art, class structure and social mobility, and cultural identification.

I met Diaz in Havana, Cuba, when we were both there for the 2003 Havana Biennial. He had been invited to participate in that international exhibition, for which he created an "I ❤️ Cuba" line of products (tote bags, beach balls, postcards, etc.). He distributed them to Cubans who in turn sold them to tourists attending the biennial—a small-scale unexpected insertion of American capitalism into that communist state. I was there on a research trip in conjunction with an upcoming exhibition at the RISD Museum called *Island Nations*, which featured art from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and the diaspora. After Diaz showed me folk objects he had found in a local market, I regretted not meeting him earlier during my week in Havana, but there was no time left for me to visit. We shared a taxi to the airport and kept in touch for a while.

About eight years passed before I invited him to create this exhibition for RISD and the larger Providence community. It has been a great joy for me to renew our friendship and to serve as a catalyst for the creation of a number of new works. I hope you enjoy the products of Diaz's exceptional mind, wit, and spirit as much as I have enjoyed working with him and sharing them with you.

Judith Tannenbaum, Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art



Alejandro Diaz, *Breakfast Tacos at Tiffany's*, 2003, performance/intervention. Photo courtesy of the artist

ALEJANDRO DIAZ

Based in New York City since 1999, Alejandro Diaz (American, b. 1963) originally hails from south Texas. His Sala Diaz, founded in 1996, is a San Antonio artists' space in a working-class Mexican-American neighborhood, and presents exhibitions funded and organized by the local community. Diaz received a BFA from the University of Texas at Austin and an MA from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College.

front cover

ENTER HERE/EXIT HERE

Portable Sign Series

2012

Two illuminated signs
Each 40 x 96 in.
(plus arrow and legs)

back cover

FREE TOASTER WITH MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP

Portable Sign Series

2012

Illuminated sign
40 x 96 in. (plus arrow and legs)
Photo © David O'Connor

not pictured

NAKED ARTIST INSIDE

Portable Sign Series

2009

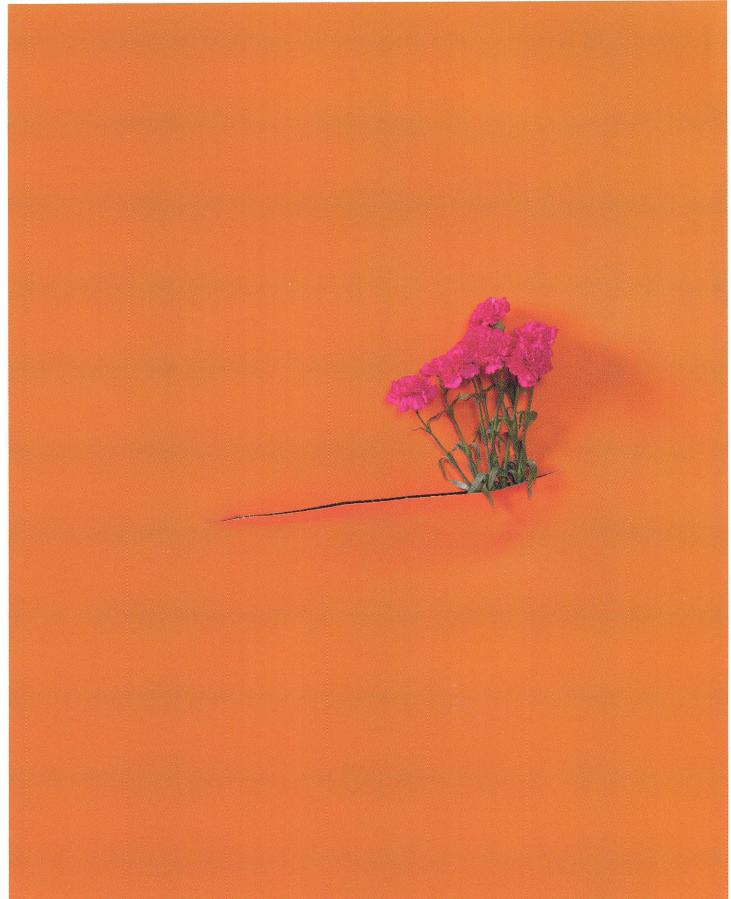
Illuminated sign
40 x 96 in. (plus arrow and legs)

On Sale

KITTENS FOR SALE

2012

Wicker basket, stuffed kittens, pillow, cardboard sign, rope
16 1/4 x 19 x 13 3/4 in.

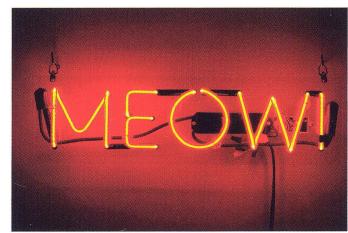


TO CHEER YOURSELF UP, INSERT FLOWERS

2012

Acrylic on canvas, artificial flowers
60 x 48 in.

Here Diaz refers to modern paintings taken too seriously by viewers and the artists who create them. Instead of being troubled by such paintings, he aims to create an artwork to elevate the spirit. By slitting the canvas—a gesture associated with Lucio Fontana, Italian artist and theorist (1899–1968), whose work involved slashing his canvases—Diaz converts it to an impromptu vase.



See page 5 for neon signs.

Say What You Mean

POVERA LITE

2012

Sixteen signs from the artist's ongoing series
Cast polyurethane resin, acrylic paint, wood
Each 13 x 18 in.

By Disappointment Only

Critics Welcome!

Does This Sign Make Me Look Fat?

Emotionally Moving Sale [a]

The Filet Mignon of Affordable Conceptual Art

Homeless but Happy

I Beg to Differ

Limo Needed 2 Hamptons 4 Dinner and Movie [c]

Looking for Nice Upper East Side Lady with
Clean Elegant Apt. (Must Have Cable)

Make Tacos Not War [b]

Mexican Wallpaper

Mexicans without Borders [d]

Straight Man Trapped in a Gay Man's Party

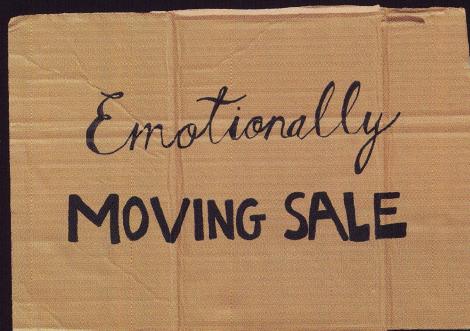
Unknown Artists at Unheard of Prices!

Will Work for Ever

World's Largest Coke Rock – 6 miles

Economical and dialogic, Diaz's text-based works rely on quotations and snippets that verbalize and draw from broad societal frameworks of everyday language.

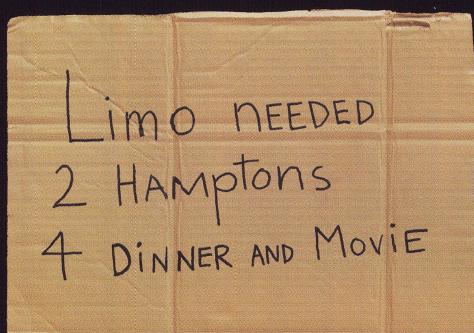
The Mexico City-based curator Victor Zamudio-Taylor astutely connected Diaz's work to Arte Povera, a postwar Italian aesthetic of hunger and adversity that uses everyday materials, economical forms, and political concepts. He described Diaz's cardboard text drawings and other signs as a "lite" version of these strategies. The artist titled his works *Povera Lite*, based on Zamudio-Taylor's observation.



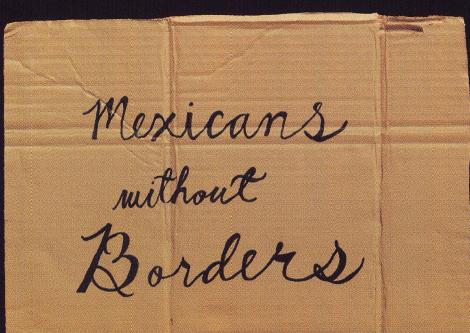
[a]



[b]



[c]



[d]



[e]

Light It Up

IN THE FUTURE EVERYONE WILL BE FAMOUS FOR \$15.00 [f]

2007

White neon mounted on clear Plexiglas
48 x 22 x 4 in.

MEOW!

2007

Red flashing neon mounted on clear Plexiglas
6 x 21 in.

Collection of Randall Beale

HAPPINESS IS EXPENSIVE [h]

2008

White neon mounted on clear Plexiglas
7½ x 63 x 4 in.

Collection of Fred Dorfman

NO SHOES/NO SHIRT – YOU'RE PROBABLY RICH [g]

2009

Red and blue neon mounted on clear Plexiglas
21 x 45 x 4 in.

ANOTHER BRIGHT IDEA

2010

Purple neon mounted on clear Plexiglas
29 x 25 x 4 in.

MORE DIOR/LESS WAR

2012

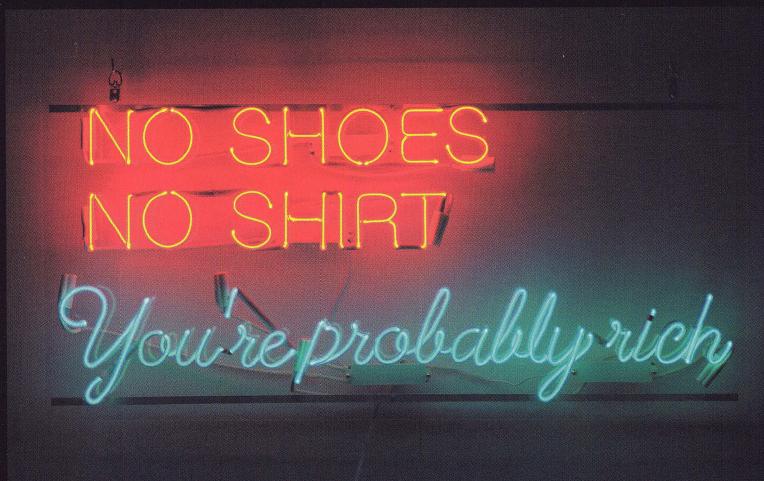
Red and blue neon mounted on clear Plexiglas
13 x 30 x 4 in.

QUALITY [e]

2012

Flickering orange neon mounted on clear
Plexiglas
39 x 10 x 4 in.

[f]



[g]



[h]

PICTURE WITH THE ARTIST'S AUNT

2012

Mounted cut-out photograph, sign, collection box
Figure: 72 x 21½ in.

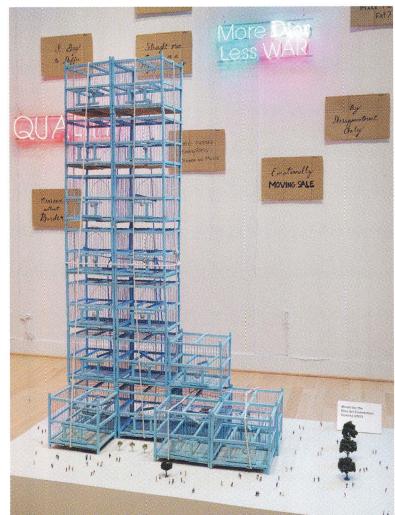
Art lover, social activist, mother, resilient breast-cancer survivor, aunt, and friend, Irene Chavez is a high school principal in San Antonio, a city in Texas with a population of nearly two million. Mexican-American women make up the largest population group in San Antonio, and Irene represents part of this growing demographic, a group that has overcome great odds.

Going back to the 1920s, one of the few employment options for Mexican-American women was shelling pecans. The federal government actually allowed an exception for pecan shellers to be the only laborers in the United States to be paid less than minimum wage, prompting a local Communist leader, Emma Tenayuca, to force a strike that eventually led to minimum wages. The women were soon replaced, however, by mechanized shelling machines. This abuse led to the type of social activism and political empowerment that the artist's aunt Irene exercises, and to a model Diaz follows in his own career.

Picture with the
Artist's Aunt
\$5.00



Models & Citizens



MODEL FOR THE DIAZ ART FOUNDATION COMING 2013

2012

Painted Mexican birdcages, rope, miniature plastic figures, and trees
96 x 56½ x 30 in.



RUBBLE WITHOUT A CAUSE

2012

Concrete rubble, dirt, sand, rocks, broken Mexican pottery, Aztec stone head (replica), plastic plant, wood spoons
Dimensions variable

Riffing on the classic Hollywood film title *Rebel without a Cause*, Diaz mixes wordplay with references to 20th-century earthworks, excavations of ancient sites, the display of artifacts in museums, and ordinary household objects.

Prophets & Cracked Pots

CASSANDRA

2012

18th-century marble statue, Mexican market bags, cardboard signs, rope
Statue: 51 x 15 x 14 in.
Pedestal: 18 x 18 x 16 in.

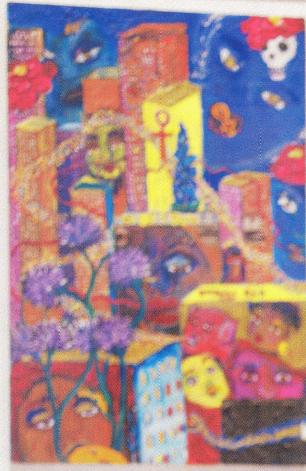
In Greek mythology, Cassandra, the daughter of Hecuba of Troy, was known to possess great beauty. Apollo was so taken with her that he granted her the gift of prophecy. However, when his affections were not returned, Apollo also placed a curse on her, so that no one would believe her predictions. While Cassandra foresaw the destruction of Troy (she warned the Trojans about the Trojan horse), she was unable to do anything to forestall these tragedies, because no one would heed her warnings. In this piece, the artist combines Cassandra's tragedy with his prophetic cardboard signs, representing the struggle artists often feel when expressing their vision to a wary public.



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LIFE!



Diaz Art Foundation

Diaz describes this installation as a mini-exhibition within the larger show—“like a pop-up store or traveling gallery.” The title, *Diaz Art Foundation*, is a riff on the Dia Art Foundation, established in Texas in 1974 as the Lone Star Foundation by Philippa de Menil, daughter of arts patrons Dominique and John de Menil, and German art dealer Heiner Friedrich. Devoted to a generation of artists who became prominent in the 1960s and 1970s—Joseph Beuys, Walter De Maria, Donald Judd, Andy Warhol, among others—it subsequently became New York’s Dia Art Foundation.

Speaking of his interest in the Dia Art Foundation, the artist remarks:

I've always been conflicted by and attracted to the international glamour of what the Dia represented, but even to this day it's amazing to me how Mexican-Americans are invisible to the art world—especially with something that originated in Texas. How could that happen?

I am, however, one of the lucky ones—with gallery representation, museum shows, and works in good collections—but I just know things could have been better, should have been better for the Latino/Latina arts community at large. With the Diaz Art Foundation, I want to celebrate my independence, creating a foundation that is inclusive and to my mind much more interesting.

Most of the displayed objects are from Diaz’s own home. Some were chosen for strictly aesthetic reasons, rather than for political content. The fact that Diaz has been able to collect art demonstrates a new social mobility, in contrast to previous generations. Moreover, the artist embraces Mexican folk traditions, whereas many Mexican-Americans were taught to be ashamed of their cultural heritage in favor of assimilation.







WORKS BY ALEJANDRO DIAZ

American, b. 1963

[a] **Lost Our Lease**, 2010

Painted Mexican birdcage
16 x 10 x 8 1/8 in.

Mexican Love Songs, \$5.00, 2010

Artificial birds, cardboard sign,
painted Mexican birdcage
16 x 10 x 8 1/8 in.

DuBuffet Table, 2011

Painted stoneware, chafing dishes, plates
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Royale Projects,
Indian Wells, California

Gold Painting #4 (after Michael Tracy),
2011

Acrylic medium, hair, 24k-gold powder
on canvas
24 x 20 in.

Mexi-Cans, 2005/2012

Fiber drums, color photoprints,
artificial topiaries
Two sculptures, each 16 1/2 in.
x 14 1/2 in. diam.

I Sleep Therefore I Am, 2012

From the *Povera Lite* series
Cast polyurethane resin, acrylic paint, wood
13 x 18 in.

Homage to Gabriel Orozco, 2012

Plastic oranges
Dimensions variable

WORKS BY OTHER ARTISTS

JONATHAN ADLER

American, b. 1966
Giant Dora Maar Lamp, 2010
High-fired porcelain bisque
26 x 14 x 14 in.

RUBEN BAUTISTA

Mexican, 1961–1990
Agave Potatorum, 1990
Oil on canvas
10 x 14 in.
Wicoxia Poselgeri, 1990
Oil on canvas
10 x 14 in.

SANDRA CISNEROS

American, b. 1954
Cat, 1997
Pencil on paper
13 x 10 in.
Collection of Franco Mondini-Ruiz

Sandra Cisneros is an American author born in Chicago and living in San Antonio. Her work experiments with literary forms and investigates cultural hybridity. Her best-known book, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), has sold more than two million copies in the United States and has been translated into fourteen languages. Cisneros received the MacArthur Foundation "genius" award in 1995.

MARY BETH EDELSON

American, b. 1933
Some Living American Women Artists/
Last Supper, 1972
Poster, signed and numbered
29 x 43 in., framed

PEDRO FRIEDEBERG

Mexican, b. Italy, 1936

[b] **Hand Chair**, 1962

Mahogany
38 x 20 x 23 in.

Hailed by Andre Breton as Mexico's chief surrealist, Pedro Friedeberg is an artist and designer best known for his 1962 *Hand Chair*. In 1998, while working on his thesis at Bard College, Diaz curated an exhibition of Friedeberg's work for the decorative-arts wing of the Phoenix Art Museum. Friedeberg has had a lifelong reputation for being eccentric, and states that art is dead because nothing new is being produced. He lives in Mexico City. When he dies, he says he hopes to be buried at the same Venice cemetery as Stravinsky and Diaghilev, "in a tomb with a white gondola and black feathers."

JEFF KOONS

American, b. 1955
Puppy Vase, 1998
Glazed porcelain
17 x 10 x 17 in.

ROY LICHTENSTEIN

American, 1923–1997
Paper plate, 1969
Screenprint on paper
10 x 10 in.

GIUSEPPE LUCIANI

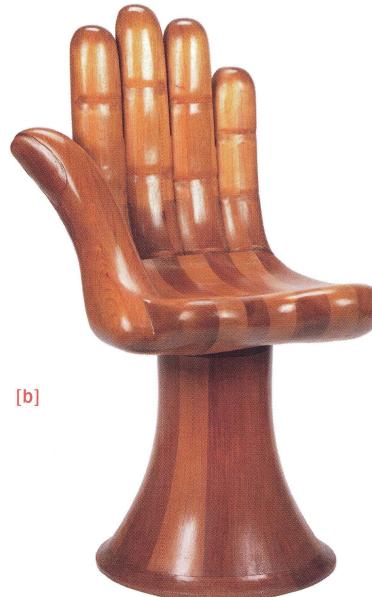
American, b. 1972
Untitled, 1996
Oil on canvas
11 x 11 in.

TRACEY MOFFATT

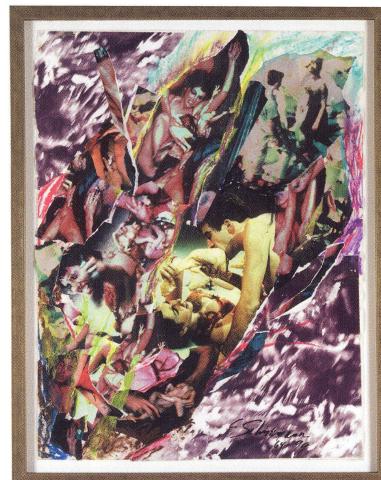
Australian, b. 1960
Up in the Sky # 19, 1997
Two-toned photolithograph
23 x 30 in.



[a]



[b]



[c]

FRANCO MONDINI-RUIZ

American, b. 1961

Koons Bunny Piñata, 2009

Mylar, paper mache

38 x 14 x 37 in.

Warhol Brillo Box Piñata, 2009Colored tissue paper, paper mache
18 x 18 x 12 in.**Yellow Onion # 5**, 2009Acrylic on canvas
46 x 36 in., framed**CARL POPE**

American, b. 1961

The Bad Air Smelled of Roses, 2006Four letterpress posters
Each 22 x 14 in.**CHUCK RAMIREZ**

American, 1962–2010

Chorizo con Candy, 2000

Inkjet print

17 x 24 in., framed

FRANK ROMERO

American, b. 1941

Untitled, 1982

Pencil on paper

10 x 17½ in., framed

CYNTHIA SANDOVAL

American, b. 1949

Sofa tissue box, 2010Velour fabric, batting, tissue box
6½ x 10¾ x 6 in.**CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN**

American, b. 1939

[c] Meat Joy, 1999Mixed-media collage on paper
24 x 19 in., framed**JON SERL**

American, 1894–1993

[d] Lady In Green Jacket, n.d.

Oil and acrylic on board

25 x 14 x 2 in.

Jon Serl was a self-taught painter who was born on an Indian reservation in New York State. He grew up in California, where he worked as child actor in vaudeville before moving to Hollywood; there he waited tables, picked cherries, and dubbed voices for silent-film actors. He was a two-time guest on Johnny Carson's talk show and an acquaintance of Clark Gable. By the 1960s, Serl was dressing like a Catholic priest and taking in runaways; he also became very involved in gardening, poetry, and painting, a pursuit he began at the age of 56. His paintings are in the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in D.C. and the American Folk Art Museum in New York.

JUDITH TANNENBAUM

American, b. 1944

Square plate, 2010

Glazed stoneware

2½ x 8½ x 8½ in.

Lent by the artist

Judith Tannenbaum was named the RISD Museum's first curator of contemporary art in 2000. In 2002, she became the Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art, the Museum's first endowed position.

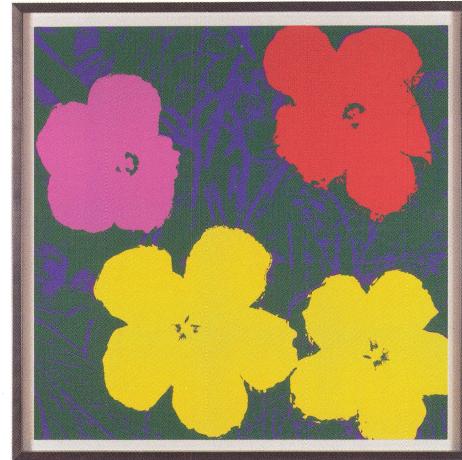
ANDY WARHOL

American, 1930–1987

[e] Flowers, 2012

Silkscreen on museum board

39 x 39 in., framed



[e]

DAVID ZAMORA-CASAS

American, b. 1959

Los Ojos de Pancha, 2000

Acrylic on canvas

36 x 24 in.

Collection of Franco Mondini-Ruiz

ARTIST UNKNOWN**Portrait of a Mexican Woman****in Mourning**, ca. 1850

Oil on canvas

27 x 21 in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, Huejotzingo, Puebla

Zacapoaxtla costume, ca. 1930s

Rayon with applied decoration and beading, embroidered bib

Center back length: 48¼ in.

The Festival de Huejotzingo includes a reenactment of the Battle of Puebla, which took place on Cinco de Mayo (the fifth of May) 1862. This costume is that of a Zacapoaxtla—one of the Mexican troops which fought against the French.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, Tzintzuntzan, Michoacán

Four plates and platters, ca. 1960s

Earthenware

9¾ in. diam., 9⅞ in. diam., 13 in. diam., 9½ x 12 in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, southern region, Oaxaca

[f] Two piñas, ca. 1960s

Glazed ceramic

Each 18 x 9 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

African, Republic of Mali, Dogon people

Mask with figure, ca. 1970s

Carved wood

42 x 9 x 7 in.



[d]



[f]

ARTIST UNKNOWN

African, western region, Ewe people

[g] **Fetish**, ca. 1990sCarved wood, beads, shells, fabric
18 x 18 x 9 in.**ARTIST UNKNOWN**

Mexican, Colima

[h] **Colander**, ca. 1990s

Ceramic

9 x 9 x 6½ in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican

[i] **Mexican church**, 2009

Painted ceramic

20 x 10 x 7 in.

TABLEAU MEXICAIN**ALEJANDRO DIAZ**

American, b. 1963

[h] **Does This Sign Make Me Look Fat?**, 2010

Glazed stoneware, cardboard sign

13 x 3 x 3 in. (with base)

Courtesy of the artist and

David Shelton Gallery, Houston

Untitled sculpture (after Picasso), 2010

Glazed stoneware

12 x 8 x 5 in.

PEDRO FRIEDEBERG

Mexican, b. Italy, 1936

Hand Chair, 1966

Wood, gold leaf

4 x 3 x 3 in.

ZAHA HADID

b. Iraq, 1950

[i] **Model for Donna Karan perfume bottle**, 2012

Plated cast resin

3½ x 6 x 2 in.

Zaha Hadid is an Iraqi-British architect who in 2004 became the first woman to receive architecture's prestigious Pritzker Prize.

Among her best-known buildings are the Vitra Fire Station (1994) and the BMW Central building (2005), both in Germany.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican

[j] **Christ figure**, date unknown

Wood, gesso

18 x 9 x 6 in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, central region

[k] **Sandal foot vase**, date unknown

Ceramic

11 x 10 x 5 in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, central region

[l] **Pestle**, ca. 1500

Volcanic stone

3 x 3 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, central region

[m] **Pot**, ca. 1500

Unglazed ceramic

6 x 7 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, central region

[n] **Bowl**, ca. 1600

Unglazed ceramic

2 x 7 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican

[o] **Head of a saint**, ca. 1800

Polychrome wood

12 x 12 x 6 in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican

[p] **Cup**, ca. 1850

Wood, gourd

4 x 2½ in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, Mexico City

[q] **Commemorative portrait of Maximilian**, 1864

Carved ostrich egg

7 x 6 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, central region

[r] **Ladies' shoe vase**, ca. 1890

Glazed ceramic

4 x 2 x 3 in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, central region

[s] **Pomegranate bank**, replica of 1920s original

Painted ceramic

9 x 4 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, southern region, Oaxaca

[t] **Pitcher**, ca. 1930

Glazed ceramic

10 x 6 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, central region, Tonalá

[u] **Tripod vase with face**, ca. 1930

Slip-painted ceramic

8 x 5 in. diam.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Southern Mexican, Oaxaca

[v] **Souvenir monkey Mezcal bottle**, ca. 1940

Painted ceramic

8 x 4 x 4 in.

ARTIST UNKNOWN

Mexican, southern region, Oaxaca

[w] **Candleholder**, ca. 1970

Glazed ceramic

9 x 5 in. diam.

MISCELLANEOUS EXHIBITION COMPONENTS**Artificial chicken dinner, artificial glass of wine****Coleman twin-size foldable cot**Metal frame, air mattress, sheets, two pillows with pillowcases, Mexican wool blanket
23½ x 40½ x 74 in.**Miscellaneous Mexican folk art****Volcanic stone metates**

(mortars and pestles)



[g]



[h]



[i]



[j]

SPECIAL OFFER!

Free Toaster with Every New Museum Membership

FREE TOASTER

2012

Toaster, faux toast, printed label

Courtesy of Ocean State Job Lot

A toaster will be given to individuals who sign

up for new or gift Museum memberships.

Available while supplies last. Please inquire
at the admissions desk.



Visitors to the exhibition may purchase products by Alejandro Diaz at risd|works, the Museum Store. Choose from a variety of T-shirts, tote bags, and related gift items. Located in the Chace Center, risd|works can be contacted at 401 277-4949 or retail@risdworks.com.

LIMITED TIME! Available at Museum Store

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MUSEUM OF ART
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

DAPHNE FARAGO WING

FREE TOASTER
WITH EVERY NEW
MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP

MUSEUM OF ART, RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN
EXHIBITION NOTES 42 FALL 2012